



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Bureau of Community and Environmental Health

Lead Exposure and High Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the force that pushes your blood through your blood vessels. When this force is too hard it is called high blood pressure or hypertension. The extra pressure puts strain on your heart and your blood vessels, and can contribute to heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. Screening for and treating high blood pressure may help prevent these other conditions.

High blood pressure often does not have obvious symptoms, so you may not know if you have it unless you are tested. A doctor or nurse can check your blood pressure very simply using a cuff that goes around your arm.

High blood pressure is a common health problem in the U.S. today, especially among people over the age of 55. Changing your diet and lifestyle and taking the right prescription drugs can usually reduce high blood pressure to normal levels.

What is the relationship between lead exposure and high blood pressure?

People who were exposed to high levels of lead are at an increased risk of developing high blood pressure. Exposure to lead does not *cause* high blood pressure. In fact, in 90-95% of cases of high blood pressure, the cause is unknown. But lead exposure is one of several factors that contribute to high blood pressure. Diet, exercise, cigarette smoking, and other lifestyle factors also contribute to your risk. A list of ways to reduce your risk is provided at the end of this fact sheet.

What can I do to reduce my risk of high blood pressure, or to lower my Blood Pressure if it is already high?

Some risk factors for high blood pressure can be controlled, but others, like your family history or past exposure to lead, cannot. This is why it is important to reduce the risks that you can control. It is wise to:

- Quit smoking.
- Reduce your level of stress.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation.
- Avoid eating a lot of salt (or sodium).
- Enjoy a healthy, low-fat diet that includes lots of vegetables and fruits.
- Exercise regularly.
- Lose excess weight.
- See your doctor regularly and be screened for high blood pressure and the other problems mentioned.
- If you have already been told you have high blood pressure, follow your doctor's advice carefully and take your medications.

What should I discuss with my doctor?

- Ask your doctor about your risk factors for high blood pressure and what you can do to prevent it.
- Ask your doctor to watch you carefully for high blood pressure and related health problems if you were exposed to high levels of lead.
- Tell your doctor about your health concerns and find out what you can do to be more healthy.
- Make sure your doctor knows that you may have been exposed to high levels of lead.

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